

1. Romans Under Lock and Key?

Kirk's volume is a revised version of his dissertation, formerly titled 'Resurrection in Romans: Reinterpreting the Stories of Israel in Light of the Christ Event'. He sets off on his course by suggesting 'Although Luther's reading of Romans was a powerful and helpful application of the epistle ... it hinged on an understanding of "the righteous God" what we must, in the end, leave behind. In giving up on this set of readings that has played so powerful a role in the western exegetical tradition, we are left searching for a different key for unlocking Romans' (p. 4). Naturally this raises the question, 'must we'? Must we really wave Luther aside so easily when his work has stood the test of 500 years of usefulness? Mind you, Kirk may be right. But he will have an extraordinarily difficult time in proving his supposition correct. He has chosen quite the Goliath to battle and he may not have the stones to slay him after all.

He continues a bit further in: 'What is the driving question in Romans? Is it "How do I find a gracious God?" or "How can this message about Jesus be the message about the saving faithfulness of Israel's God?"' (p. 7). He will presume that it's the second, following Hays. 'Paul declares his intentions and themes in Rom 1:1-7' (p. 8). And 'In Romans, the resurrection of Jesus becomes Paul's key for demonstrating that the promises contained in the Scriptures have been fulfilled in the Christ event' (p. 8). Kirk may be oversimplifying. There are, after all, a number of issues which concern Paul as he composes this letter and rendering them all down till they are congealed into one 'overarching' theme may be a bit too much 'Biblical Theology-esque'. Let Paul be Paul, and free him, I would say to Kirk, from the chains of Wright who would circumscribe his theology into something singular.

2. Functions of Resurrection in Early Judaism

'... Our purpose is to argue for four functions which resurrection performs in the variegated renditions of Israel's story stemming from the Second Temple period' (p. 15). 'These fall into four categories: justice and vindication, motivation for righteous behavior, restoration of creation, and the restoration of Israel' (p. 15). The chapter naturally fulfills its purpose and Kirk does a fantastic job of summarizing the texts which fall into each of the aforementioned four categories. More than that, he avoids the mistake so many make when they write about Judaism and its beliefs in the first century CE: he does not cite either the Mishnah or the Talmud. Such anachronistic use of late materials is too widespread and Kirk is to be commended for rejecting, implicitly if not explicitly, that common procedure.

Kirk also rightly, I think argues that '... theodicy is an essential element in early Jewish beliefs about resurrection' (p. 24). '... God's justice would need a new arena, a new creation, in order to be fully worked out. ... We should therefore not be surprised when a first century Christian Jew named Paul, grappling with the question of God's righteousness, suffuses his work with resurrection' (p. 24).

3. Resurrection, Messiah, and the Justification of God: Rom 1:1-7 and 15:12

'When introductory and concluding segments reiterate one another, we find ourselves on solid ground when looking to their themes as the keys to unlocking the whole' (p. 33) says Kirk at the opening of the third chapter of his grand volume. Of course the problem is, this is not quite so. While it is true that 'inclusio' often indicates rather a lot; making rather a lot of it can mislead. Take, for example, the letter to Galatians, which begins with Paul and ends with Paul. Yet know one, that I know of, would argue that the letter is about Paul. Paul is incidental to the purpose of the letter, just as resurrection is incidental to the purpose of Romans (which is to describe the justification of the sinner by grace).

In the present chapter, though, Kirk thoughtfully promotes his theory of the centrality of resurrection, showing evidence from Romans 1 and 15. Significant problems, though, arise at the conclusion of his discussion of chapter 1, when he writes 'Rom 1:1-4 prepares the readers of the letter to interpret Hab 2:4 as a first demonstration of resurrection hermeneutics in the letter: the One who was righteous by

faith now lives' (p. 47). This is, to be fair, special pleading bordering on eisegesis. Such a reading of Habakkuk has nothing whatsoever to do with the Hebrew text (which Kirk admits).

Further problems come to the fore in his discussion of Romans 15. His insistence that ἀνίσταμενος in Rom 15:12 refers to Jesus' resurrection is another case of special pleading bordering on the cusp of eisegesis and as was the case of the Hebrew text of Hab. 2, the source of the quote in Rom 15 (Is 11:10) in Hebrew can scarcely be imagined to refer to any sort of resurrection. And, to his credit, Kirk admits 'A minimalist reading of Rom 15:12 which sees only an indication that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promised line of Jesse is an exegetically responsible position' (p. 50). Kirk follows this sage remark with 'Yet...' and all is lost, as he goes on after presenting contrary evidence to opine 'ἀνίσταμενος is thus well read as an allusion to resurrection' (p. 53). Kirk may well be right. But with two Old Testament passages which do not support his theory used to support his theory, said theory is on fairly uncertain ground. 'With these latter exegetical conclusions from Romans 15, the case with which we began this chapter is strengthened: we are on solid ground to look at resurrection hermeneutics as a key for unlocking the message of Romans' (p. 55).

Needless to say, I'm not so sure.

4. Resurrection and the Promise of Abraham: Rom 4:13-25

Kirk's careful and thoughtful exegetical skills are best on display in this chapter where he really does bolster his case with exquisite ability. If I were to quibble, I would do so only on a few points. Namely, like so many New Testament scholars Kirk makes use of materials dating centuries after Paul to explain Paul. On p. 71 he calls into the witness box the Eighteen Benedictions where God is described as the 'one who gives life to the dead. The prayer views resurrection as a future hope and as a quality of God stemming from his nature as life itself.' To be sure, this may well be what the benediction means; but it may not be what Paul meant in Rom. 4. Kirk may well have been better served to make use of contemporaneous Greek material as this would have gotten him closer to the world-view Paul addressed.

Mind you, Paul was a Jew and he addressed Jews who, however, were thoroughly Greek in outlook. The Bultmannian method of seeking understanding through the lens of the Greco-Roman world of New Testament themes has been abandoned post World War II simply because a sense of guilt has driven exegetes, particularly in Germany, to rediscover the Jewish world of Jesus and Paul. Unfortunately the pendulum swung too far and the Greco-Roman milieu was virtually ignored (and has been, essentially, ever since). Crossley made the same mistake in his 'Why Christianity Happened' and the worst offender is NT Wright who sees nothing but Judaism behind every tree. Kirk, then, is in good company. But company that's too interested in seeing what may not be there.

This critique, though, should in no wise be taken as a diminishment of the value of Kirk's exegesis here. Indeed, when he notes 'Thus, the justification of God (theodicy) finds a preliminary answer in a reworked assessment of who God's people are' (p. 80), such a remark is profoundly insightful. God's people are those Jews and Gentiles conjoined through faith in the resurrection of Christ. Kirk here proves, I think, his case: that resurrection is indeed central to Paul's efforts in his letter to the Romans (if that letter is aimed at 'breaking down the wall of separation' between Jews and Gentiles).

5. Resurrection and Final Salvation: Rom 5:9-10

'The resurrection of the crucified Christ becomes for Paul, in 5:12-8:11, a new source of life lived in accordance with the desires of God, displacing Torah as the locus of parenesis' (p. 84) says Kirk at the start of his brief treatment of the core text of Romans 5. As Kirk's argument unfolds I have to admit that he is slowly but surely winning me over to his point of view. I was rightly skeptical to begin with, but, bit by bit, Kirk is making his case. 'What 5:9-10 shows us is that the resurrection of Jesus gives

Paul a new perspective on the final judgement and subsequent entry into the age to come; the next three and a half chapters of Romans rework every major function we saw resurrection performing in early Judaism on the basis of this resurrection eschatology' (p. 85). And then the best line in the volume to this point, 'Christian hope, for Paul, is resurrection hope' (p. 91). Who can disagree with that? And the second best line, '... the salvation discussed here [in Romans 5] is not how a person "gets in" the covenant community, but the ultimate, eschatological results of "staying in" or not staying in' (p. 93). Right! Daniel persuadeth me to be a holder of his viewpoint... almost. But 'the fat lady hasn't sung yet' and the argument isn't concluded.

6. Resurrection and Mosaic Law (I): Rom 5:12-8:11

Eight pages into this chapter Kirk asks 'What, then, does all this have to do with the place of the law in the story of Israel?' (p. 105). I was beginning to wonder that myself, so Kirk is to be congratulated on his anticipation of his reader's thoughts. What this chapter has to do with the central question at hand is described on the next page when Kirk writes 'Paul argues for an Adamic rather than Mosaic source of condemnation at the final judgment, and conversely that he argues for a christological rather than Mosaic source of justification at the final judgement. Because the problem of sin and death extends beyond the reach of the Torah, the solution is also beyond the reach of Torah...' (p. 106).

And so begins, at least for me, the slightest, just the slightest, indication that Paul was (in Kirk's reading) a supersessionist. Whether he was, of course, is one of those questions that dogs biblical studies to this very moment. Throughout the chapter the cloud of supersessionism hangs over the readers head. This may in fact be what Paul believed. But I'm not quite so sure. Paul was, it seems to me, more interested in correcting Judaism than abandoning it.

Another potential problem with Kirk's argument in this chapter is his dependence, again, on quite late Rabbinic material to illustrate the thought of Paul. 'The proximity of his expression to, for example, "All who die obtain expiation through death" (Sifre Num 112) does not indicate that Paul is taking over such ideas...' (p. 112). Indeed it does not, since Paul predates the cited material and so can hardly be said to be dependent upon it.

[And yet another difficult bit is something of a grammatical error on page 116 (top line of the page): '... governed by the sin and death...' I mention this not to be pedantic but in hopes that when the volume hits its second edition, this might be corrected. As an aside, this is, so far, the only such error in the entire book! Daniel had some fantastic proof-readers on hand.]

But, to return to Kirk's argument and a more positive tone, I think him quite right to cite Schweitzer when he notes 'The tragic thing was that this pneumatic and holy law ... laid upon the natural man demands which only the pneumatic man could fulfil' (p. 126). And this, I think, clearly and rightly describes the dilemma Paul faced when attempting to reconcile his Judaism with his Christianity. But then he continues 'Far from undermining God's faithfulness to God's people, the righteousness which comes through the Christ event and apart from Torah shows that God is committed to bringing Israel's story to its intended conclusion -- even at the deep cost of reassigning the role of the law to God's own crucified and risen Son' (p. 129) and the hint of supersessionism rises on the horizon again. And that hint becomes a plain embodied reality when Kirk concludes his chapter with 'No longer is God's justice to be looked for in the vindication of those who keep the law. The death and resurrection of Jesus is itself the display of God's righteousness' (p. 131). Judaism is thus superseded. And unnecessary. Hear we hear the authentic Paul or Augustine or Luther?